

SITUATION REPORT NO. 8

INCIDENT NO. 2003-028

DATE: September 18, 2003 TIME: 12:00 p.m.

TO: Governor John Hoeven
State Capitol
Bismarck ND 58505

1. **NATURE OF DISASTER:** **Serious Fire Danger** – Lingered drought conditions prevail in portions of western and southwestern North Dakota. The combination of hot, dry and windy weather conditions, and explosive vegetation significantly increases the risk of catastrophic wildfires. Wildfires that start are likely to grow quickly and will be more intense and difficult to control, as well as more threatening to firefighters. The remainder of the fire season has the potential to be very active.
2. **DEATHS AND INJURIES:** One fatality in Logan County on September 5 resulted from an approximately 10-acre grassfire that ignited after a tractor tipped, pinning the driver beneath it.
3. **DAMAGES:** August fire reports by state and local officials have underscored the severity of conditions conducive to fire activity. During the period of August 27-28, more than two dozen fires were reported, with half caused by lightning. For the month of August, 121 fires were reported on 12,000 acres. The average number of acres burned for the month is around 500.

On September 11, a N.D. Forest Service report pointed out that 50 percent of all wildfire activity occurs in North Dakota between August 15 and October 31. Any rain will have little effect on the moisture content of prairie fuels that will dry out over the next two weeks, although it will help moderate the fire danger for several days at a time.

For the week ending September 7, the North Dakota Agricultural Statistics Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), indicated high temperatures and low soil moisture supplies continue to stress late season and oilseed crops and pastures in most areas of the state. Average topsoil moisture supplies declined. September 7 topsoil moisture supply ratings were 44 percent very short, 41 percent short, 15 percent adequate and zero percent surplus compared to 14 percent very short, 27 percent short, 54 percent adequate and five percent surplus last year. USDA reports showed pasture condition ratings continued to decline due to hot, dry conditions. Pasture conditions were rated 56 percent very poor to poor, compared to 49 percent the previous week. Stock water supplies were rated 18 percent very short, 34 percent short, 48 percent adequate and zero percent surplus.

ADAMS COUNTY:

During the period of August 23 to August 29, the Adams County Emergency Manager reported four separate fires. The first fire resulted from a propane tank explosion. The ensuing fire destroyed a house, a Quonset building, farm equipment and 385 acres of grassland. The second fire, reported in a ditch, burned less than one-half acre of grassland and a third fire, also burning less than one-half acre, was caused by haying equipment. Lightning caused a fourth fire in central Adams County, which burned less than one acre along with one hay bale.

BILLINGS COUNTY:

On August 27, a unified command system was established between the Billings County Rural Fire District and the U.S. Forest Service to coordinate efforts to extinguish the Franks Creek fire located seven miles north of Medora. The Franks Creek fire burned approximately 200 acres and resulted in a response cost of \$80,000.

DUNN COUNTY:

On August 26, the Dunn County Emergency Manager reported a grass fire that ignited a coal vein along N.D. Highway 200 near mile marker 107. The Halliday Fire Department initially extinguished the grass fire, but smoldering in an adjacent field near the highway was noted on August 28. Notification then began for outside assistance to begin excavation of the affected area in an attempt to extinguish the fire. The Halliday Fire Department continued to monitor the site between August 29 and September 3, noting that the burning was continuing to progress east along N.D. Highway 200 within 10 feet of the roadway. On September 4, personnel from the N.D. Department of Transportation (N.D.DOT) and the State Fire Marshal assisted the Halliday Fire Department, responding with one backhoe, one 5,000-gallon tanker truck and one dump truck, to begin excavating the site. The coal vein was opened to promote attempts to extinguish the fire and the excavated coal was hauled to another area and extinguished. The site was filled in with dirt and the N.D. DOT and State Fire Marshal consider the fire contained at this time.

HETTINGER COUNTY:

On September 5, the N.D. Forest Service reported a 50-acre fire in a stubble field and creek area near the city of Regent. The cause of the fire was unknown.

LOGAN COUNTY:

On August 26, the Napoleon Fire District reported three fires between 4 p.m. and 10 p.m. The first fire consumed five acres of stubble field and a shelter belt. One tractor fire and one hay bale fire were also reported. On August 27, one acre of pastureland ignited due to a hot bearing on a hay baler and a second fire involved a recall to the August 26 shelterbelt fire that had rekindled. On September 3, 300 large hay bales burned eight miles east and five miles south of Napoleon with an estimated loss of \$9,000. On September 8, the Napoleon Fire Department responded to a grass fire seven miles southeast of Napoleon, which burned 300 acres of pasture and Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) land.

McINTOSH COUNTY:

On September 2, the McIntosh County Emergency Manager reported 14 hay bales destroyed by fire, six miles west and three miles south of Wishek. The ignition source was a lightning strike. On September 4, the Wishek Fire Department

responded to a grass fire 12 miles west and one-half mile south of Wishek. Approximately 20 acres of grassland were consumed in the fire. The source of ignition was contributed to an electrical arc from a power line. On September 6, a small grassfire in a field near Zeeland was ignited by a combine. Estimated cost of damage to the combine was \$1,500. On September 9, fire consumed 15 acres of grass in a roadside ditch north of Ashley. The source of ignition was undetermined.

McKENZIE COUNTY:

On September 8, the McKenzie County Emergency Manager reported a 150-acre prairie fire 20 miles southwest of Arnegard. The Alexander and Arnegard Rural Fire Departments, along with U.S. Forest Service and N.D. Game and Fish personnel, responded to the fire. On September 9, fire burned 50 acres of grassland in a rugged area of the Theodore Roosevelt National Park's north unit. Fifty acres of private land located one and one-half miles west of the north unit also burned, with units from the Arnegard Rural Fire Department, Dakota Prairie Grassland Fire Department and the U.S. Park Service responding. A second fire, reported one mile west of the National Grasslands Summit Campground along U.S. Highway 85 near mile marker 122, consumed five acres of grassland. Units responding to the fire included the N.D. Forest Service, the N.D. Game and Fish Department and the Grassy Butte Fire Department. All fires were ignited by lightning strikes.

MORTON COUNTY:

On August 29, the Morton County Emergency Manager reported sizable trees, which had been involved in earlier fires seven miles south of I-94 exit 140, were continuing to burn. Bullinger Tree Service was contracted to cut the trees down and Morton County fire units extinguished the trees to eliminate the threat of continued wildfires from that ignition source. On September 8, the Mandan Rural Fire Department with assistance from the Bismarck Rural Fire Department responded to the same area to extinguish a fire that had been ignited by additional smoldering trees, which also were cut down to eliminate the source of ignition.

PEMBINA COUNTY:

On August 31, Pembina County officials reported two hay bale fires in separate locations due to arson.

RANSOM COUNTY:

On September 9, the Ransom County Emergency Manager reported a large fire at the county's largest dairy farm, which destroyed one barn along with 700 tons of stored hay. The Lisbon and Gwinner Fire Departments applied water on two adjacent barns to prevent them from burning. The source of ignition was believed to have been farm machinery.

SIOUX COUNTY:

On August 21, the Selfridge Fire District reported 10 acres of pastureland burned west of Selfridge, along with the swather that was believed to be the source of ignition. On August 31, the Selfridge Rural Fire District reported 200 acres of grassland burned west of Fort Yates.

STARK COUNTY:

On September 5, Stark County Emergency Management reported approximately nine separate hay bale fires in the Dickinson area ignited by unknown means between 1:30 am and 6:00 am. Fires ranged from single large hay bales to a

haystack. Locations ranged from near the Dickinson city limits to several miles east and west of Dickinson, and near New Hradec in Dunn County. Suspect fires were deliberately ignited and are under investigation by the Stark County Sheriff's Department, Dickinson Police Department, Bureau of Criminal Investigation (BCI) and the State Fire Marshal.

WILLIAMS COUNTY:

On September 2, the Tioga Fire Department responded to a grass fire five miles northwest of Tioga. Upon arrival, mutual aid was requested from the Ray Fire Department. The fire consumed 100 acres of grassland and the source of ignition was undetermined.

4. RESOURCES:

LOCAL: The Washburn Rural Fire Department provided personnel and equipment during the Franks Creek fire in Billings County during the period of August 27-28.

STATE: No change from previous reports.

FEDERAL: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service provided resources during the August 27-28 Franks Creek fire in Billings County.

5. VOLUNTEER ACTION: No change from previous reports

6. MAJOR ACTIONS: On September 8, the Grand Forks Sheriff's Department imposed a county-wide burning ban prohibiting any open fires or burning of fields and ditches during the period of September 8-9 due to the extreme fire danger index.

7. ASSISTANCE NEEDED: No additional assistance has been requested

8. OUTSIDE HELP ON SCENE: No additional outside help has been requested

9. OTHER INFORMATION: The N.D. Division of Emergency Management's Situation Reports are posted on the Division's Internet home page. The address is <http://www.state.nd.us/dem>.

Douglas C. Friez, State Director